

Ian Rosen: MAK Center

Hainley, Bruce, Artforum International

In the penultimate lecture of his course on "The Neutral," Roland Barthes considers "anxiety," which he is quick to differentiate from "fright." ("There is something about anxiety," Barthes writes, pace Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "that protects its subject against fright and so against fright neurosis.") He relates the example of a white mouse, dropped into "a circular empty space, without nooks, without markers: it feels exposed, vulnerable to predators; and above all anxiety: the conflictual situation (cf. double bind) ... divided between the need to eat and the need for flight." The mouse displays, or seems to display, emotional reactions ("surprisingly, compulsive grooming gestures"). Barthes's take is tempting to read as an allegory for the creative process, for art: Thrown into the blank space of anything goes, the artist is torn between survival ("the need to eat") and imagination ("the need for flight"). Exacting Proustian, Barthes implicates his own practice in his urge to interpret the mouse's plight. He concludes, anxiously (?): "Enigma: how to interpret these gestures? But perhaps, and that's the reason why I raise the issue: we might be totally, utterly wrong, so much are we prisoner of both our anthropomorphism and of language (it's the same thing): perhaps it hasn't anything to do with grooming (cf. often, I've been told, birdsong, a song of suffering and of anger)."

The only visual marker of Ian Rosen's current project is a moody photograph of an interior threshold of Rudolf Schindler's Kings Road House, once home to both the Schindler and the Neutra families and their experiments in living, now the site of the institution, as Rosen's press release states, "pleased to announce its cooperation in the presentation of an exhibition." The shot is undated, the photographer unknown. What you are now reading instantiates Rosen's "art" as much as anything that occurred at 835 North Kings Road. Cooperation--between Rosen and someone at the MAK Center, between you and me--remains the key term of Rosen's endeavor. Part of his generosity consists in the possibility that I could be wrong (in my interpretations, assumptions, and grooming) and/or the chance that if I don't care at all and dismiss him, I'm jettisoning some basic component--the cooperative fun--of art.

Rosen strives for a neutrality available only, perhaps, to the imaginary. Eschewing not just the more accessibly dematerialized antics of Tino Sehgal and Jonathan Monk and the romanticized nothingness of Ceal Floyer and Joelle Tuerlinckx, but also the disciplinarian tradition of Joseph Kosuth and *Art & Language*, Rosen quests after something so indisputably real that a) in responding to his project any resulting anxiety may be just a reality check that you're still breathing and b) after said check, you may wish to ask, Why does he care whether or not what he's opening to discussion is called art?

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

I don't know. But noting that this show occurred after a related interaction in Vienna with HausWittgenstein and his participation in the bicoastal show "Grupe," curated by Darren Bader, for which he negotiated certain formalities--the exhibition checklist read, "Ian Rosen // A work may be made available" (with accompanying verbal instructions to gallerists that they could provide interested visitors with his "contact info for possible further discussion")--marking his own cooperation within the modes of the group exhibition, I would hope that Rosen would attenuate his relations to stern talker Ian Wilson and elusive walker Stanley Brouwn and embrace, inversely, the luminous eccentricity of Lee Lozano. (Of her infamous Dropout Piece, Lozano wrote that it was "the hardest work I have ever done.") The difference, even philosophically, between "nothing" and "something" cannot be a Green Zone.